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TAGS: OIIP KMDR TC
SUBJECT: SPECIAL MEDIA REACTION: AHMADINEJAD VISITS THE UAE

¶1. SUMMARY: "Gulf News" called Ahmadinejad's visit an opportunity to "open a new page in relations." "Khaleej Times" opines that the visit marks a "clear shift in greater Middle East politics, one involving a break from the traditional status-quo-maintenance to a proactive resolution of lingering crises and disputes." End Summary.

¶2. Under the headline "Red letter day in UAE-Iran ties" an unsigned editorial in Dubai-based English language daily "Gulf News" 5/14: "The landmark visit by Iranian President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad to the UAE can, and should, open a new page in the relations between the two countries." The visit comes at a trying time in the region. Iran's nuclear issue could explode any time with the United States making its intentions clear that it will do everything in its power, including military force, to stop the Islamic republic's controversial program. However, the UAE-Iran ties, although historic and strong, have had their lows due to the continuous Iranian occupation of the three Emirati islands. The UAE has done all it can to solve the dispute. UAE leaders repeatedly called on Iran to either get into direct talks or accept international adjudication. Iran continues to refuse both offers. "The bilateral ties are vital to both countries. That shows in the exceptional reception the Iranian president got at the airport yesterday. President His Highness Shaikh Khalifa Bin Zayed Al Nahyan and His Highness Shaikh Mohammad Bin Rashid Al Maktoum, Vice-President, Prime Minister and Ruler of Dubai, were at the airport along with a number of senior officials to greet the visiting leader."

"The UAE is also Iran's biggest trading partner and Iranian non-oil imports from the UAE amounted to \$7.67 billion in the Iranian year to March 2006, some 20 per cent of its total. Also, the UAE has always shown its keenness to strengthen relations with its Muslim neighbour and refused to join the US-led efforts to isolate Tehran. In a March interview, Shaikh Khalifa said the UAE would never allow its territory to be used for "hostile activities" against Iran. "Therefore, it is incumbent upon Ahmadinejad, the first Iranian head of state to come here in the UAE's history, to use the occasion to open a new chapter in our relations. And a genuine effort to address the islands issue would be a good beginning."

¶3. Under the headline "Welcome, Ahmadinejad" an unsigned editorial in Dubai-based English language daily "Khaleej Times" 5/14: "Iranian President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad's visit to the UAE confirms two important developments in the changing political landscape of the Middle East."

"Firstly, the cordial start to the tour and the friendly and constructive negotiations quickly laid to rest some international observers' apprehensions about the polity's ability to successfully carry out a 'sensitive juggling act' - having sociable relations with both Washington and Teheran. Secondly, on a slightly larger scale, it bolsters analyses seeing a clear shift in greater Middle East politics, one involving a break from the traditional status-quo-maintenance to a proactive resolution of lingering crises and disputes."

"That the visit of Iranian president comes at the heels of the Saudi brokered Hamas-Fatah truce, Ahmadinejad's historic journey to Saudi Arabia, the Arabs uniting on the GCC front to throw the peace-deal ball in Israel's court and rising anti-Western sentiment in Arab capitals, does not come across as much of a surprise. In fact, it is conformation that unprecedented (mostly West-provoked) jolts to the region's fabric have moved the collective leadership to finally drop hopes of foreign powers moving to heal regional wounds. Instead, they have decided to overcome as many regional rigidities as possible, and that too quickly, so a unified outlook can precede a yet more concrete change of course - one that realizes the political as well as economic potential of the region."

"And in that exercise, the UAE shall play one of the most crucial roles. The UAE stand out as a severe rebuttal to East-West clash. In a short span of time, they have carved one of the world's most powerful business and tourist attractions right out of the sand of the desert. In a world where terrorist threats and border security concerns battle with free trade deals and ultimate growth figures in world leaders' minds, the Arab heartland is reorienting its modus-operandi to minimize avoidable disturbances and forge the most amicable deals. That is why increased UAE-Iran interaction is welcome. It will provide for increased economic and trade interaction, which will smoothen negotiations over territorial

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disputes. This reflects the political maturity of regional leaders, and is appreciated as the way forward."

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